number of Extra Departmental officials, now called Gramin Dak Sevaks working with Department of Posts is 2,86004 as on 31.3.2006.

(b) and (c) The following suggestions/recommendations made by the Justice Talwar Committee have already been considered and accepted by the Government:

(i) Increase in the allowance of Gramin Dak Sevaks by a factor of 3.25 for a period from 1.1.96 to 28.2.98.

(ii) Introduction of the concept of Time Related Continuity Allowance (TRCA) in respect of Gramin Dak Sevaks in lieu of monthly allowance related to work load *w.e.f.* 1.3.1998.

(iii) Increase in the amount of ex-gratia gratuity admissible to Gramin Dak Sevaks from Rs. 6,000/- to Rs. 18,000/-

(iv) Introduction of the concept of paid leave for Gramin Dak Sevak @ 10 days for every half year without the provision of carry forward or encashment.

(v) Increase in office maintenance allowance admissible to Gramin Dak Sevaks, Sub Postmasters and Branch Postmasters from Rs. 25/- to Rs. 50/- per month.

(vi) Even in the absence of any recomendations by Justice Talwar Committee in its report, provision of Severance Amount of Rs. 30,000/- in case of retirement or death, if the period of continuous employment of Gramin Dak Sevaks employee is minimum 20 years and Rs. 20,000/- if a Gramin Dak Sevak has completed 15-20 years of continuous employment, has been made. On absorption to regular departmental post, the Severance Amount of Rs. 20,0007- is payable after 15 years of continous employment.

Enhancing air-connectivity in the NER

2597. SHRIMATI SYEDA ANWARA TAIMUR: Will the Minister of DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH EASTERN REGION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Foundation of Aviation and Sustainable Tourism engaged by North Eastern Council has submitted its study report for enhancing air-connectivity in the North Eastern Region and the same has been circulated to all the North-Eastern States for their comments;

(b) if so, whether the North Eastern Council has received comments on its study report from all the North Eastern States: and

(c) if so.lhe details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH EASTERN REGION (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) NEC has received comments from only two States,/.©. Nagaland and Mizoram.

(c) The two State Governments have stated that air connectivity particularly intra-region connectivity needs to be further improved and the air fares rationalized in North-East. They have also suggested review of present arrangements between NEC and Alliance Air and installation of ELS at all the airports in North East.

Passport offices in district

†2598, SHRI UDAY PRATAP SINGH: Will the Minister Of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are considering to open a passport office in every district in order to facilitate and simplify the procedure of obtaining a passport; and

(b) if so, the details thereof, State-wise?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) No. There is no such proposal at this juncture. Currently, there are 464 District Passport Cells (DPCs) in India, which accept passport applications. The Government have been impressing upon the concerned State Government to open DPCs in the remaining districts of the country as early as possible.

Posting of Tamil knowing High Commissioners

2599. DR. K. MALAISAMY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.